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Book Reviews: "Three Kentucky Artists"; Et al.

BOOK REVIEWS

Walter Darrell Haden, Editor

J. Winston Coleman, Jr. *Three Kentucky Artists*. University Press of Kentucky, 1980.

"The three artists whose lives are the subjects of these essays enjoyed considerable fame in their own day, although they are now little known outside of Kentucky," J. Winston Coleman, Jr., prefaces his small book on three artists of Kentucky's past: Joel Tanner Hart, Edward Troye and Samuel Woodson Price. He states that he is neither an art critic nor a student of art history: "I have made no attempt at critical evaluation of the works of my subjects, nor have I attempted to assess their respective fields." Of course, he does do some of these things; no one could write about artists and their works without making an occasional critical judgment and drawing some conclusions as to the value of their works. But in all fairness to Coleman he has managed to refrain from doing much of this. What he has done of importance is to compile lists of the known works of the three men in the hope that they might prompt others into researching in depth the men and their works.

Coleman, who is the author of books on mesmerism and articles on Kentucky history, has written an interesting book about these three all but forgotten artists.

Joel Tanner Hart (1810-1877) became the first Kentucky sculptor to gain international fame. Born in a log cabin near Winchester, Kentucky, he had three months of formal education, educating himself by reading and studying at night. An architect who lived nearby loaned him books on architecture and sculpture. Those on sculpture must have interested him most for in his early years he was apprenticed to a stonemason. For the next fifteen years, Hart worked at that profession and also at cabinetmaking; at twenty-two he even taught school. In 1833 he moved to Lexington and worked for a monument yard there, carving and lettering ornaments and figurines.

Schobal Vail Clevanger, a young Cincinnati sculptor, persuaded Hart to execute an original sculpture of a small boy. Encouraged by moderate success he gave up his job at the monument yard and opened his own studio. His first big commission was a bust of General Cassius M. Clay. During the next few years he studied anatomy in the medical school of Transylvania University in Lexington and traveled to several cities.

He was commissioned by a group of women to execute a full-length statue of Henry Clay. Like other American artists of his day, he wanted to study in Italy, which he was able to do so with the down-payment on this commission. He found quickly that he was technically far behind European

artists. To remedy this deficiency, he studied anatomy in London's finest medical schools and studied the sculptures and paintings at the art capitals of Europe.

By the fall of 1859 he had completed the twelve and a half foot high marble statue of Henry Clay, but not before he had experienced much bad luck: his first model of Clay, while being shipped to him, was lost at sea; he almost died of cholera and typhoid fever; the ladies of Richmond failed to send him more of his commission money so he was forced to take on whatever work he could find.

Coleman describes Hart's development of a "painting instrument," a queer-looking device with scores of needles and iron rings which, Hart claimed, enabled him to copy "to perfection in marble whatever is produced in the model." His fellow students failed to take his invention seriously; however, the British were fascinated with the idea of being measured by it and gave Hart several commissions. Without these he could not have remained in Europe.

Coleman calls Hart "careless and indifferent in his way of life." He spent money freely and in periods of financial distress did second-rate sculpture, but what these were Coleman does not say. Hart appeared to be a perfectionist in his work and yet was, according to Coleman, temperamental and inconsistent in his work, not unlike Edward Troye (1808-1874).

The latter painter, when for "want of pence," painted potboilers without reputation, usually portraying animals prized only by their owners. Of the people he painted, some were well-known personalities, such as General John Hartwell Cocke, William Giles Harding, the Tennessee turfman, and General Winfield Scott.

Troye, born in Switzerland of French aristocratic descent, spent the majority of his life in the United States, where he enjoyed more financial security than Hart or Price. After study in England as Edward de Troy, he abbreviated his name to Edward Troye shortly after settling in Philadelphia, where he became a painter of animals for a magazine.

For fifteen years he was to make sketching trips through the southern states. His best work was the portrayal of thoroughbred horses in an age when commercial photography was not fully developed. His paintings are the "only pictures we have of the horses whose descendants are today making turf history." Troye became to his field what Aububon was to his. Wealthy southerners commissioned him to paint not only horses of fame and reputation but little known ones that were purely personal favorites. On a horse-buying trip to the Middle East with wealthy patron Alexander Keene Richards, in search of Arabian studs, Troye painted many religious canvases in the area around Jerusalem.

During the Civil War, Troye found it difficult to get work, so he finally went to Europe to stay through the duration of the conflict. Afterward, he attempted to run a plantation in Alabama and to stock it with blooded

horses, but the enterprise failed probably due to his lack of managerial ability. Since the war had destroyed so many of the great racing and breeding establishments, few owners were left with the means of having their animals painted, so Troye, like Hart, also found little work. Troye left his wife and their Alabama plantation and returned to Kentucky, where he was given a studio and home with Keene Richards. There he spent the remainder of his life, painting despite failing eyesight and trembling hands. He died July 25, 1874, aged sixty-six, of pneumonia and heart disease.

Samuel Woodson Price (1828-1918), born near Nicholasville, Kentucky, was a successful portrait painter and became a general in the Union forces during the Civil War. He showed an early interest in art, but his father, Major Daniel Price had little sympathy for the boy's interest in art, and sent him to a military academy. It closed at the end of his second term, and Price returned to Lexington to study under Oliver Frazer, a little known Kentucky portrait painter. Apparently this was an honor since Frazer had turned down many other aspiring artists. One of Price's earliest successes was a portrait of the town drunk. On Frazer's advice Price enrolled at the Art School of Design in New York, where he spent five months, supporting himself with the income from his sketches and drawings.

After marrying, Price tried his hand at farming. He travelled north where he did a portrait of Millard Fillmore. His expanding success took him throughout Kentucky and other states. All the while, it seems he had kept his hand in military training, being at various times a member of the Lexington Light Cavalry and drillmaster of an infantry unit. When the Civil War started, he was made a colonial in a regiment of the Army of the Cumberland. After a post-war failure in politics, he returned to painting, living a year on the farm for health reasons. Journeying to Washington D.C., he painted portraits of generals under whom he had served: George H. Thomas, William S. Rosecrans and Tecumseh Sherman. The Thomas picture brought Price his greatest critical success.

The Civil War and his failing health prevented Price's becoming a prolific painter. Many of the considerable number of paintings he did produce are either lost or are as yet unidentified. Coleman calls the painter's works "excellent examples of portrait painting at its best by a successful and talented ante-and post-bellum Kentucky artist."

Despite its miniscule number of illustrations and particularly the lack of color paints, this book is packed with interesting details about the lives of three otherwise all but neglected Kentucky painters. There are certainly incidents, personalities and art works enough to whet the appetite of prospective historians and art critics.

Thel Taylor

John D. Wright, Jr., *Transylvania: Tutor to the West.* The University Press of Kentucky, 1980. New Bicentennial Edition, 445 pp.

John D. Wright has good reason to know his subject well, and he writes well about Transylvania University's first two centuries. Professor Wright has taught history there thirty of those years, and somehow has managed to remain objective about this college. He avoids the twin dangers of too much detail, to which Walter Jennings fell victim in an earlier history, and of too much generalization, to which Niels Sohn was lured in his book on the college.

Yet Wright has written more than just another institutional history. The social and intellectual history of the nation are woven well into this account. It probably became such a good book because Wright had such great raw material upon which to draw; the fourteenth oldest college in the country; chartered by Governor Thomas Jefferson in Virginia solely on faith and foresight in 1780, at the time the British were chasing him out of Williamsburg and off Monticello; an institution that was influenced directly by Yale and Harvard to become a rival to both those colleges, with law school and medical college in the eighteen twenties rivalling the best and taming the frontier; a campus that participated in practically every major theological and governmental controversy and always emerged strongly as the defender of academic freedom and nonsectarianism, and that did so in spite of having to eke out its existence on the barest of endowments and incomes; and a campus across which paraded giant figures of the 19th century frontier and many of the 20th--Stephen Fuller Austin, Henry Clay, Horace Holley, Albert Sidney Johnston, Cassius Clay, John Hunt Morgan, Constantine Rafinesque, Jefferson Davis, Mary Todd Lincoln's relatives, "Happy" Chandler, Adlai Stevenson I, John C. Breckinridge, James Lane Allen, Champ Clark, William T. Barry, Jesse Bledsoe, Benjamin Dudley, Daniel Drake, John Crittenden, John Harlan, and John Fox, Jr. When Jefferson Davis was a U.S. Senator from Mississippi, he found five other senators from Transylvania serving with him and twelve other former Transylvania students over in the House of Representatives.

That cast of characters passed across the stage of Transylvania and gave it vitality in passing. Robert Penn Warren, receiving an honorary doctorate there in 1980, reflected on how unlikely was its beginning, chartered as it was before the country was settled, only five years after Daniel Boone's Boonesborough and twelve years before Kentucky statehood. Other visitors preceded Warren in giving the college periodic doses of hope: Lafayette in 1825, Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954, Aldous and Julius Huxley, Thomas Jefferson through letters and donations, John Adams, Edward Everett, and others.

Abolitionism, evangelical denominationalism debates, Old Court/New Court controversy, vaccination, Darwinism, the "Red Scare", all touched Transylvania.

So, too, did intercollegiate athletics. The first intercollegiate football game in the South was played April 8, 1880, in Lexington, where Stoll Field stands, and Transylvania beat Centre College 13¾ to 0. In 1907, Transylvania beat Texas, Texas A&M, and Arkansas, tied Northwestern, and then dropped football the same year for financial reasons. (It revived soon afterward and lingered until 1942 before passing on forever.)

The book is a chronicle of tenacity as a brave little college fought wilderness, cholera, egalitarianism, vocational education, poverty, civil war and world war, fire, and even a few duels in its struggle to survive. As it continues that struggle with adversaries long familiar to it, Professor Wright's chronicle offers an inspiring story of faith in action that is the college's best endowment and legacy.

Professor Wright is a graduate of Dartmouth and Columbia. This book is an updated second edition of a work first published in 1975 after over two decades of research. The documents in Transylvania's Rare Book Room and in its Coleman Collection of Kentuckiana were important assets in his research. The book echoes Daniel Webster, also of New Hampshire: "It's a small college, but there are those of us who love it."

Larry T. McGehee